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Wallestone, Aimee. "More Than ZERO: Heinz Mack." *www.artinamericamagazine.com (Art in America)*, 21 January 2011.

## Art in America

Following its own 2008 group survey, New York gallery Sperone Westwater continues to propose reevaluation of the post-war German group ZERO with its latest show, a solo presentation of artist Heinz Mack's silvery "Early Metal Reliefs," dating from 1957-1967. The works are made of aluminum, stainless steel, wood, glass and other industrial materials, which the ZERO bunch used for their simplicity and commonness. The artist turns 80 next year.

With artist Otto Piene, Mack founded the Dusseldorf-based ZERO Group in 1957, responding to Germany's post-war rubble, economic miracle, and creative vacuum. On the occasion of this solo show, the artist told *Art in America* of his discussions with American counterpart Barnett Newman, about Adorno's pronouncement of the end of lyrics poetry after Auschwitz: "That statement impressed me, but we wondered: Is beauty allowed?"

Mack's works use reflection to manifest the artist's search for immaterial essence in the formal principles of light. *Box of Light Spirals* (1966), for instance, is a playful sculpture that uses the form of the vessel to explore light and motion.



One of the most elemental works is *Lamellen-Relief* (1967–1968), a wall piece comprising short strips of shiny aluminum on a wood base, illustrating the efficient transcendence of this work.

The other works here are kinetic, a hallmark of the ZERO crowd and a testament to the period's hyper-industrialization and interest in dynamism. *Silber-Rotor* (1956–1960) rotates an aluminum disk with simple, direct precision. It's a clear influence on artists like Olafur Eliasson and Janet Cardiff. The divide between Mack's stationery pieces and his kinetic sculptures is gossamer-thin, however: Viewing these works together, the motion of the motors is replicated by the catalytic motion of the viewer in the still sculptures.

Mack cites Moholy-Nagy as the originator of electric artworks, but recalls when Yves Klein first invited him to visit the Paris workshop of Jean Tinguely. The latter had built up a very powerful object of iron rods welded together with a small, fast motor, to which Klein had added some signature blue paper. The collaboration made a lasting impact, says Mack: "Tinguely pushed me-before I began making kinetic sculpture, he said, 'What you're doing with your art is completely all right, but you really should work with motors.'"

More than 100 artists have exhibited in ZERO-themed shows, and the group has been cited, notably by Valerie L. Hillings, as a loose artistic tendency that was trans-national and, in some ways, trans-generational. Lucio Fontana was integral; he was nearly three decades older than Mack and Piene. Close associates like Tinguely, Klein, Günther Uecker and Piero Manzoni produced pieces that effectively distill

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the foundational principles of the group: fundamentally, a desire to reinstate the analysis of materiality in the wake of Europe's pan-destruction.

At the time there were only two galleries in Dusseldorf, and the ZERO artists first exhibited with Alfred Schmela gallery. Says Mack, "There were no collectors, and because of this we felt a wonderful freedom. We could do what we wanted to do. This freedom was really powerful." The current show coincides with an increased market value for this work, and a scholarly interest that continues to lag. However, this spring, the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn hosts a career retrospective, "Light-Space-Colour," and follows the artist's progress after ZERO disbanded in 1967.

Indeed, Mack's reliefs are just one segment of his output, which is unique because many ZERO artists stuck to signature media. He's also painted, drawn, and made works of public and land art. "There are some artists who create one flower, and, with all due respect, they just take care of that one..." says Mack. "In my case, it's not one flower and it's not one garden: it's a landscape and it's very large and diverse."

*"Early Metal Reliefs" is on view through February 19.*